



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
1250 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

May 19, 2011

Ms. Lillian Koller, J.D.
State Director
South Carolina Department of Social Services
P.O. Box 1520
Columbia, South Carolina 29202

Dear Ms. Koller:

The Children's Bureau, in collaboration with the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS), completed a review of South Carolina's Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data during the week of September 20, 2010. The final report on the AFCARS Assessment Review (AAR) is enclosed, which includes the AFCARS Improvement Plan (AIP).

We appreciate the amount of time and effort that your staff committed to the planning and implementation of the AFCARS Review. We would especially like to thank Lynn Horne, Judy Seals, Jose Encarnacion, and Judy Caldwell for their time and input for the AFCARS Assessment Review.

The AAR evaluates two areas: the AFCARS general requirements (reporting populations and technical standards) and the data elements (foster care and adoption). Information collected on these areas is combined and based on an analysis of the findings a rating factor is assigned to each of the general requirements and each data element. The rating factors are: "1," the system is not collecting the AFCARS data elements and the data are not transmitted to ACF; "2," technical corrections are required; "3," improvement in data quality is needed; and "4," the State fully meets the AFCARS standards. The enclosed report provides a more detailed explanation of each of the rating factors, as well as, charts that summarize the State's rating factors for the General Requirements and the Data Elements. As part of the post-site visit analysis, the State's documents, the data, the case file review findings, and the onsite notes were assessed to make the final determination of findings. The State team should carefully review all the findings in each document as there have been some changes from the onsite findings. Below is a chart depicting the State's rating factors.

General Requirements (22)

Rating Factor	Foster Care (8)	Adoption (3)	Technical (11)
4	5	2	9
3	2	0	2
2	1	1	0
1	0	0	0

Data Elements (103)

Rating Factor	Foster Care (66)	Adoption (37)	Total (103)
4	27 (41%)	12 (33%)	39 (38%)
3	12 (18%)	2 (5%)	14 (14%)
2	27 (41%)	23 (62%)	50 (49%)
1	0	0	0

The findings matrices in Tab A of the report include the final analysis and findings for the General Requirements and the data elements. Tab B includes the AFCARS Improvement Plans (AIP). As noted in the above chart, 49% of the data elements require some type of technical correction. These corrections include making modifications to the extraction code to set the AFCARS element to blank if the data are missing in the child’s electronic case file and the remapping of the State’s values to the correct AFCARS value.

Many of the technical corrections will affect multiple data elements but the correction is to a field that populates several AFCARS elements (e.g., the race field and Hispanic/Latino Origin fields). One technical correction that needs to be made in the extraction code relates to how a child’s placement date and the number of moves are calculated. It was discovered during the case file review that when a placement setting undergoes a change in status (for example a foster parent is now considered a pre-adoptive parent, or there is a change in the foster parent’s license) the extraction code was counting these as placement moves. While we found several errors in the case file review that reflected an over-count of placements, it is possible that the overall placement count may not decrease. One reason this may occur is that non-acute care hospitalizations are not counted correctly in the extraction code, as well as certain placements in therapeutic foster homes.

One issue with the design of the system that was identified was with the screens used to record the child’s medical, mental, and behavioral health conditions. There are several locations on multiple screens where this data can be entered. The screen from which AFCARS information is reported is not used by workers. There are “Medical” and “Mental Health” screens where more comprehensive information is recorded. Also, having multiple locations to enter the same information is an issue not only for AFCARS but also is a compliance issue with the Federal requirements for a Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). The State must develop a way to streamline data entry of disability information and prevent the need for duplicate data entry in order to promote improved data quality for these elements.

Due to corrections that are needed for the foster care elements, the State will have to resubmit AFCARS data for past report periods. The State and the Children's Bureau will discuss which reports will be required for resubmission, taking into consideration those used for the State's current Child and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan.

Within 30 calendar days after the receipt of this report and the attached AIP, the State staff must submit the AIP electronically to the Children's Bureau with estimated due dates for completing the tasks in the AIP. An electronic copy of the final matrices will be e-mailed to your staff. Additionally, the State's plan for implementing the changes to the system and for caseworker training must be included in the State's title IV-B Child and Family Services Plan and Annual Progress and Services Report as part of the information required by 45 CFR 1357.15(t) and 45 CFR 1357.16(a)(5). The Regional Office will work with the State to determine if technical assistance is needed, and available, to implement the AIP. The State may obtain technical assistance from the Children's Bureau's Network of Training and Technical Assistance Centers.

In closing, I would like to thank the staff who participated in the review for their hard work and their commitment to collecting accurate and reliable AFCARS data. If you have any questions regarding the report, please contact Angelina Palmiero at (202) 205-7240.

Sincerely,

/s/

Joseph J. Bock
Acting Associate Commissioner
Children's Bureau

Enclosures

cc: Kelly Cordell, Accountability, Data and Research, SC DSS
Ruth Walker, Child Welfare Program Manager, Children's Bureau, Region IV
Electronic Copy - Division of State Systems, Children's Bureau
Electronic Copy - Child and Family Services Review Team, Children's Bureau